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Why Test?

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Editorial Comment

WHY TEST?

In accordance with an act of the Michigan State Legislature, tests designed to measure achievement in the areas of vocabulary, reading, English expression, and mathematics are being administered to children in grades four and seven throughout the state. The tests are given on two consecutive days, and an investigation of social and economic factors of students participating is being made. The purpose underlying the study of the performance of children in grades four and seven has apparently not been made clear to school administrators, teachers, and parents.

Well constructed tests are objective, reliable, and valid. They must be administered, scored, and resulting data interpreted by individuals with a background in psychometrics. In this evaluation physical, psychological, and sociological factors must be considered. Scores mean nothing aside from the conditions under which they were obtained. For example, one does not effectively predict the possible speed of an automobile by pointing out that when observed it was traveling 15 miles per hour. Neither should one evaluate the reading performance of children on the basis of insufficient and unreliable data.

Tests are instruments which are employed to accomplish a purpose. Objective data can be helpful to psychologists, educators, sociologists, and specialists in the life sciences. Reading teachers, therapists, and clinicians will be interested in studying and interpreting data resulting from tests administered to such a wide sampling. Inferences can be helpful to school administrators, parents, teachers, and students. Militant critics, however, and those individuals who wish to discredit our educational system at all levels may have an opportunity to do so. They will probably accentuate the negative, eliminate the positive, and find what they want to find.

Homer L. J. Carter
Editor